

warning for those in this growing area of concern.

Animals as a source of human transplant organs is an equally fascinating section, commencing with a superb chapter by Richard Werner, recounting the futuristic tale of the earth's occupation by a 'superior' race, the Bios. The diary of a human scientist unfolds in a dialectical discussion on whether humans can be sacrificed, as well as other animals in the cause of another race. Arguments of speciesism and the greater good of all 'nature' rather than parts come alive in this original presentation. After this, other chapters in this section seem rather heavy and philosophical, devoted in the main to arguments about sacrificing life for organs and assessing the quality of life for either healthy animals or very handicapped humans. All agree that healthy animals should not be made to suffer and that harvesting human organs after death is preferable when transplantation is necessary to save the life of another.

Finally there are two brief chapters on the nurse's role, which are rather prescriptive and uncritical. Nurses are seen to have a primary role as patients' advocates and this is accepted apparently because previous nursing authors have supported and written about this. The second author illustrates this principle with the case of Baby Doe, reminding the reader that the child (not the family) is the primary responsibility of the nurse, who acts as his advocate.

In summary this is a useful collection for those, such as students, who are interested in learning about medical ethics, and it may stimulate debate and help others to realise there are many ways of looking at ethical problems. A quote from Richard Werner captures the essence of this subject and is sadly in contrast with the message from some of my nurse colleagues:

'I do not see it as the job of the moral philosopher to draw moral conclusions,

to tell other people what they ought to do, if for no other reason than they won't listen anyway... The important point is for one to develop one's own reflective morality, not to receive someone else's conventional wisdom'.

JENIFER WILSON-BARNETT  
Department of Nursing Studies  
King's College London  
552 King's Road  
London SW10 0UA

## Human Life and Medical Practice

J K Mason, 161 pages, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, £17.50, 1988

Professor Mason faces the harsh question head on: do we, should we, aim for quality or quantity of life? Is the sanctity of life paramount, or is the capacity for enjoyment of that life to be a prominent factor in the ethical equation? In this careful analysis of the problems raised by abortion (around 172,000 cases a year in this country), euthanasia, fetal and neonatal rights and the definition of death, he sets out the issues with clarity and gives his own views with the firmness and modesty to be expected from one who has over many years developed a strong philosophical stance, derived from experience and close study of the views of others.

The author could be said to have missed a trick over abortion. The real effect of the Abortion Act, 1967 is that it legalised abortion 'on demand', since the requirement that the mother will be at greater risk if the pregnancy goes to full-term is satisfied in every case by the statistics for maternal death and morbidity, at least in the first trimester. This was revealed by the gyrations of

Professor Huntingford and the Attorney-General over the validity of certificates under the Act: a striking example of legislation unwittingly contradicting the intention of Parliament and flying in the face of current ethical views.

The great value of this book is its historical perspective, illustrated by specific examples which clarify the issues – (sometimes: whether the *Gillick* case cleared or befogged the air is open to argument.)

Not surprisingly, the *Arthur* case figures prominently in the discussion. While the case was directly concerned only with the rights of a neonate and its parents, it raised a number of issues which go to the root of medical ethics, many of which are still unresolved. The value of Professor Mason's analysis is that he gives us the reasoning behind the 'pre-Arthur' and the 'post-Arthur' approaches to the problems of the defective neonate, so providing a framework for the examination of other ethical problems. It might have been some comfort to the tragic Dr Arthur to realise that he had at least polarised the chaotic views of his profession.

The other great virtue of this short book is the full annotation, with reference not only to the literature (somewhat scanty and often tendentious) but, more important, to all the leading cases in English law, and to many from North America. This is probably the only way to make sense of the network of strands of thought in this changing area. One aspect he does not cover, nor could he do so to any effect is: what is the duty of the doctor faced with the 'need' to sterilise a girl unable to consent by reason of her mental state, but too old to be made a ward of court? The House of Lords grappled with this problem recently and permitted it 'in the existing circumstances'.

MS MARGARET PUXON QC FRCoG  
5 Pump Court  
Temple  
London EC4Y 7AP

## News and notes

### Professorship in medical ethics for JME's first Editor

Dr Alastair Campbell, the first Editor of the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, has been appointed Professor of Biomedical Ethics in the Medical School of the University of Otago, New Zealand. He will also be the Director of the university's newly established

Bioethics Research Centre. Dr Campbell was previously Senior Lecturer in the Department of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology, Edinburgh University.